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IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECLARATION ON THE ELIMINATION OF ALL FORMS OF INTOLERANCE AND OF DISCRIMINATION BASED ON RELIGION OR BELIEF

Letter dated 3 January 1992 from the Permanent Mission of the Syrian Arab Republic to the United Nations Office at Geneva addressed to the Centre for Human Rights

The Permanent Mission of the Syrian Arab Republic to the United Nations Office at Geneva presents its compliments to the Centre for Human Rights and has the honour to transmit herewith a letter containing information on the situation of Syrian citizens of the Jewish faith, for circulation as an official document of the forty-eighth session of the Commission on Human Rights under item 20 of the agenda.

Information regarding Syrian citizens of the Jewish faith

1. For hundreds of years, Syrian citizens of the Jewish faith have coexisted in peace and harmony in the Syrian Arab society in which they were born. Throughout history, none of them has been subjected to any discrimination or persecution, and they have shared in all aspects of life in the country. In recent decades, however, they have been pressured and coerced by external forces to leave their homeland. In response, and in order to eliminate the residual effects of that campaign, the President of the Republic issued directives in 1976 aimed at boosting their economic and social situation. As a result, they became more resolutely attached to their homeland, expanded their properties and businesses, and virtually abandoned any idea of emigrating abroad.

2. The life of Syrian citizens of the Jewish faith is organized in accordance with the Constitution, without discrimination and on an equal footing with all other citizens. Some articles of the Constitution are quoted below:

Article 15 - (1) Property may be expropriated only in the public interest in return for fair compensation in accordance with the law.

Article 25 - (1) Freedom is a sacred right. The State shall guarantee the personal freedom of citizens and shall safeguard their dignity and security.

Article 26 - Every citizen has the right to participate in political, economic, social and cultural life as prescribed by law.

Article 33 - (2) Every citizen has the right to freedom of movement in the territory of the State.

Article 35 - (1) Freedom of belief is inviolable and the State respects all religions.

(2) The State guarantees the freedom to engage in all religious practices provided that such is not prejudicial to public order.

Article 37 - Education is a right guaranteed by the State and is free at all levels and compulsory at the primary level.

Article 44 - (1) The family is the basic unit of society and is protected by the State.

(2) The State protects and encourages marriage.

3. There are currently 3,655 individuals of the Jewish faith comprising 584 families distributed throughout the various Syrian governorates. The vast majority, however, live in the governorates of Damascus and Aleppo, these being two main trade centres, followed by the town of Qamishli. The majority are engaged in trade (textiles, ready-made clothing, yarn, oriental gifts, jewellery). Others practise crafts (goldsmithery, copperwork and copper engraving), while a considerable number hold academic qualifications and university degrees (doctors, engineers, pharmacists, lawyers).

4. At Damascus, there are 22 synagogues, all of which are located in the Jewish quarter, apart from the Jubar Synagogue, which is located in the town of Jubar, near Damascus. There are also two private Jewish schools: the Ittihad al-Ahli School comprising kindergarten and primary sections, and the Ibn Maimun School comprising kindergarten, primary and preparatory sections. The Ittihad al-Ahli School has 208 pupils (194 girls and 14 boys) at the

kindergarten and primary levels, while the Ibn Maimun School has 473 pupils (72 girls and 401 boys) at the kindergarten, primary and preparatory levels. Sixty-six secondary-level pupils (43 girls and 23 boys) are enrolled in State schools.

5. Twenty-six university students from Damascus are pursuing their higher education at Syrian universities as follows:

Medicine:	Ten students at the Universities of Damascus, Aleppo and Tishrin.
Dentistry:	One student at the Baath University at Homs.
Pharmacology:	Five students at the University of Damascus.
Faculty of Law:	Five students.
Faculty of Commerce:	Four students.
Faculty of Education:	One student.
French literature:	Six students at intermediate colleges.
Engineering (architectural and mechanical):	Four students at the University of Damascus.

There are also a number of students following undergraduate or postgraduate studies in medicine and other subjects in various countries (United States, Canada, Britain).

6. Some 77 students have graduated from university in various specialist fields, primarily medicine. All practise their specializations, apart from seven who work in business for financial reasons.

7. A number are working in the private sector. The main sectors concerned and the number of related commercial shops in Damascus are as follows:

Textiles and ready-made clothing:	122 shops
Tailoring:	100 shops
Oriental gifts and copper engravings:	23 shops
Gold and jewellery:	21 shops
Meat:	11 shops.

A small number are also engaged in other sectors such as the grocery business, upholstery, crystal, wool and shoes.

8. At Aleppo, there are two synagogues, the first situated in the Jamiliyah district, and the second in the district of Bandara al-Islam/Qula. There is one school for members of the Jewish faith, namely the Samaw'al private school, which has 171 pupils (99 boys and 72 girls) at the kindergarten, primary and preparatory levels. There are 11 teachers of the Jewish faith on the school staff. Six secondary-level students (four boys and two girls) study at the private Scientific Institute at Aleppo.

9. There are eight university students in all (four men and four women) specializing variously in economics, agriculture, English literature, medicine and secretarial skills. One student is pursuing higher studies in medicine in the United States. There are 12 university graduates in various specialist fields, half of whom are practising their specializations, with the remainder employed in commerce.

10. At Aleppo, the numbers from the Jewish faith working in the private sector are as follows:

Gold trade:	70 persons
Textile trade:	12 persons
Printing and dyeing:	8 persons
Wool trade:	2 persons.

Some are employed in other miscellaneous areas of work requiring only one person, such as the sale of stationery, groceries, haberdashery items, confectionery or poultry, commercial agency work, commercial accountancy, car dealership and dealing in second-hand equipment.

11. At Qamishli, there are no special schools for members of the faith in view of their small numbers. Instead, the 27 children (10 boys and 17 girls) at the primary, preparatory and secondary levels are educated in State schools. There are two university students; one studying mechanical engineering at Aleppo and the other studying medicine in the United States.

12. The members of the faith are engaged in the following private sector areas:

Textile:	13 shops
Upholstery:	1 shop
Hairdressing:	5 shops
Goldsmithery:	2 shops.

13. During the academic year 1990/91, the following nine members of the Jewish faith graduated from the country's universities:

Dawud Amin Misha	Tishrin University, Latakia	Medicine
Shahada Haim Haswah	" "	"
Joseph Khudr Darziyah	University of Damascus	"
Kamil Jamil Yitsha	University of Aleppo	"
Victor Eli Khaskah	University of Damascus	Physics
Joseph Nuri al-Kad'	" " "	Mechanical engineering
Arlette Moise Sa'adya	" " "	Pharmacology
Laila Yusuf Futaiha	" " "	"
Rosette Eli Maisur	" " "	Medicine

14. The incidence of marriage and the percentage of married couples among the members of the Jewish faith living in the Syrian Arab Republic varies in the three towns of Damascus, Aleppo and Qamishli in view of the differing sizes of their respective populations. Over the last 10 years (1981-1991), there have been 229 marriages at Damascus, 55 at Aleppo and 6 at Qamishli. The members of the Jewish faith have their own religious court which supervises marriage, divorce and other such matters in accordance with the precepts of the Jewish religion. The court is presided over by Ibrahim Hamra, the Chief Rabbi.

15. The Syrian Arab Republic has preserved the Jewish cemeteries, not only at Damascus but also in the other governorates inhabited by Jews. The cemeteries have also received particular attention insofar as many roads have been diverted around them for this purpose, which has not been the case with other cemeteries and places belonging to other faiths.

16. The members of the Jewish faith annually celebrate a number of different religious festivals. They perform their religious rites in complete freedom and have Saturday as their weekly holiday. Details of their festivals are as follows:

Feast of Dedication	25 December	8 days
New Year for Trees	15 February	
Feast of Lots	14-15 March	
Passover	15-22 April	
Revelation of the Torah (Pentecost)	6-7 June	

Commemoration of the Destruction of the First and Second Temples	9 August
Jewish New Year	1-2 October
Day of Atonement	10 October
Feast of Tabernacles	15-22 October
Rejoicing of the Law	23 October
Feast of Supplications and Prayers	September and early October.

17. Both men and women of the faith travel abroad. Between 1981 and 1990, approximately 45 per cent of their total number were granted passports. During 1990 and 1991, about 129 passports were issued, 61 to males and 68 to females.

18. Only two members of the faith are currently held in prison, having received a six and a half year judicial sentence effective from their date of detention.

19. Syrian citizens may live wherever they wish, without restriction. The members of the Jewish faith have continued to live in the Jewish quarter at Damascus, where they feel they can easily practise their religious rites, where they have their own schools and where they can buy meat slaughtered according to Judaic law. A number live outside the Jewish quarter, such as:

- David Albert Hanunu, who lives in the Qisa' district, on the first floor of the Katib Building, in a privately owned home situated on plot no. 385/5;

- Shama'a Khudr Lawz, who lives in the Qisa' district, on the third floor of the Ghattas and Khouri Building, in a privately owned home situated on plot no. 61/6;

- Fu'ad Yusuf Sa'adya, who lives in the Bab Tuma district, (behind the Family Club) in the Muhaish Building situated on plot no. 236;

- Faraj Ahu Liyab Khalifa, who lives in the Bab Tuma district (French Hospital area), in the Badin Building, in a privately owned home situated on plot no. 335.

20. Syrian citizens of the Jewish faith enjoy their political rights and participate in elections to the presidency of the Republic, the People's Assembly, provincial councils and trade unions. They exercise these rights continuously and without restriction. On 2 January 1991, and with as much enthusiasm as other Syrian citizens, the members of the Jewish faith took part in the referendum on a new constitutional term of office for the President of the Republic. Three days prior to the referendum, they marched in their thousands to express their loyalty and support for the nomination of

President Hafez al-Assad for a new constitutional term. Headed by Ibrahim Hamra, Chief Rabbi and leader of the Jewish community, and members of the Jewish Council, they marched through the main streets of Damascus carrying banners of support written in Arabic, English and Hebrew. During the march, the Chief Rabbi made a statement in which he said:

> "President Hafez al-Assad is the symbol of national unity, and the Jews of Syria have benefited from the many achievements made during the era of President al-Assad. The Syrian Jews will say yes to President al-Assad on the day of the referendum, as he has given us a lot and we can never do enough for him."

21. The British Broadcasting Corporation, Reuters and the French Press Agency were among the media which carried reports of the march. Once the results of the referendum had been announced, a delegation of prominent Syrian-American Jews visited the embassy of the Syrian Arab Republic in Washington, on 4 December 1991, to convey congratulations from the Syrian-American Jews in Brooklyn, New York, on the election of President Hafez al-Assad for a new constitutional term. The delegation of Syrian-American Jews denounced the demonstrations recently staged by some Jews outside Syrian embassies in a number of European countries, and made clear its lack of support for such demonstrations, which served only to further Israel's political goals.

22. On the twenty-first anniversary of the Corrective Movement, which was led by President Hafez al-Assad in 1970 and is annually celebrated on 16 November, the President received a telegram of congratulations from Ibrahim Hamra, the Chief Rabbi, on behalf of the Religious Council of the Jewish community in Damascus, commending the wisdom and leadership of the President and the generous manner in which the Corrective Movement had treated all sects and religions. The President also received similar letters of congratulation from the Religious Council of the Jewish communities in both Aleppo and Qamishli.

23. In addition to the foregoing, we would also like to point out the following:

1. In Syria, there is no so-called Jewish problem or Jewish question, despite all the politically-motivated campaigns in this regard.

2. In Syria, there is no discrimination or distinction in treatment between citizens on the basis of religion or belief. The law applies to all citizens alike, irrespective of their denomination or creed.

3. Syrian citizens of the Jewish faith are Syrians first and last, and the Syrian Arab Republic will not promulgate legislation granting them special privileges that are not enjoyed by other Syrian citizens.

4. The Syrian authorities are always eager to ensure that citizens do not leave the country to emigrate abroad. Restrictions and specific procedures are imposed on all Syrian citizens who wish to travel abroad, regardless of their religious or confessional beliefs. There are no restrictions on the freedom of movement of Syrian citizens of the Jewish faith or on Jewish girls travelling abroad in order to marry, even though the percentage of males is higher than that of females.

5. Syrian citizens of the Jewish faith enjoy a manifestly high standard of living, and they are all provided with ample opportunities for employment and economic activity.

6. There is no discriminatory entry on the personal documents of Syrian citizens, such as identity cards and passports, since the holder's religion is not specified on any such documents.

7. The Constitution endeavours to protect personal property and ensure that it is not expropriated. The competent authorities have never confiscated and subsequently given to others any home belonging to a member of the Jewish faith.

8. There is no restriction on the admission of students of the Jewish faith into Syrian universities. Many of them are currently pursuing higher studies in foreign institutes and universities in all fields of specialization.

9. Members of the Jewish faith are obliged to perform compulsory military service. They are not exempt, although their enlistment is deferred, in the light of the numerous applications for deferral that they have made to the competent authorities, by reason of the small size of their community and in order to enable them to support their families.

10. No member of the Jewish community has been subjected to administrative or arbitrary detention, and there have been no instances of enforced or involuntary disappearance. No member of the community has been subjected to torture during detention, while any member against whom a judicial sentence is handed down is permitted to receive periodic visits from his relatives and enjoys good, healthy conditions of detention.